

BLACK SKIN BLACK FLAG



THESE COLOURS DON'T RUN



STANDARD ISSUE 3

***Atlantic Slavery
And British Capitalism***

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Atlantic Slavery And British Capitalism

Ralph McDowell

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Welcome

Welcome to Standard Issue 3 of Black Skin Black Flag, a series of black consciousness, anti-capitalist pamphlets. This issue looks at the contribution millions of enslaved and brutally coerced African slave labourers made to the speedy (industrial) development of Europe and in particular the boost given to British capitalism from the 15th-19th centuries. This was a crucial period in history where Britain leaped far ahead of its near rivals France and Spain and gathered the military and economic strength to soon after slaughter, conquer and colonise peoples all over the world.

Part 1 is an introduction to Atlantic slavery, names and shames the five main European culprits (Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Britain and France) and traces, from the 1440s up until the 1880s, their State sanctioned political and economic involvement in one of the most historically grotesque and wicked examples of wealth creation the world has ever known. Part 1 also assesses the negative impact this had on Africa and ends with a summary of the events and political motivations that brought about the end of Atlantic slavery and slave trading. Part 2 takes a closer look at the many different ways in which the Atlantic economy provided stimulus to early capitalism in Britain and focuses on those sectors of the British economy that were most affected and involved closest with the slave system in the Americas and slave trading off the African coast.

BSBF Aims:

- To expose and challenge to the white monopoly/supposed authority on moral, historical and spiritual truth.
- To reiterate and update the economic, social and political discriminations that constrains black people living in a multi-cultural society.
- To explain the many historical and present day practices employed by the so called "Civilised West" to keep Africa weak.
- To bridge the state sponsored racial "divide and rule" strategy that weakens and distracts the working class as a whole from uniting under one banner.
- To restate the many moral dysfunctions of capitalism.
- To highlight the social inequalities and injustices as well as the ecological damage that makes up the capitalist reality.
- To investigate the emotional and spiritual costs that are caused by a system based on overwork, consumption and debt.
- To make clear that an alternative, just and better world is possible.

Support Addis Ababal

20% of all BSBF profits are being sent directly to a trusted source at a school on the east side of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to support two students whose families are not able to provide them with their food at lunchtimes or to buy their school uniforms. Dejazmatch Wordirad Primary School currently holds around 4,500 students from the ages of 6 to 13. Class Section 4c, taught by Yemate Zenebe, consists of 62 students (29 boys and 33 girls) aged from 9 to 13 years old. Two of the students (Abenezer Tadesse Feyssa and Abenezer Dessalegn Juffar) regularly miss out on their lunches and are prone to poor concentration, falling asleep during class, poor punctuality and poor grades.

BSBF pledges:

1,716 Ethiopian Birr (£70) – Mid August 2012 (paid 21 August)

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This is providing much needed lunch money (50p per student per day) for the two boys for the school years September 2012 through to June 2014.



1. Introduction to the Atlantic Slave Trade

The Atlantic slave trade era can be divided into two distinct phases. The early period was dominated by the Portuguese and, to a lesser degree, by the Spanish, with other European nations participating to a smaller extent, typically only selling Africans from their vessels to Portuguese and Spanish colonies. The second period began around the middle of the 17th century, first with the rise of the Dutch, shortly followed by English and French colonial expansion.

Birth and rise of Atlantic Slavery: 1440s-1650s

By the end of the 14th century, Europe was facing a severe shortage of gold. In response, Portuguese expeditions were sponsored to sail down the West African coast (from 1419) to try to locate and gain control over the source of gold that was, up until then, entering Europe via the Arab controlled ports of North Africa. In the process, Portuguese settlers colonised the East Atlantic islands of Madeira (1419), the Azores (1427-50), the Cape Verde Islands (1450-60) and the Canary Islands (1476-79). In 1470-71, Portugal finally reached the "Gold Coast" (West Africa) and, over the next 30 years, built a string of coastal forts for provisioning and trading purposes. Ships' crews had been seizing and purchasing Africans and selling them at auction to wealthy buyers back in Lisbon from the early 1440s for a wide range of labouring and domestic activities. Meanwhile, sugar production was established in Madeira in 1446 and, from the 1460s, was being produced in a number of nearby islands, supplied by a growing slave trade off the African coast. These off-shore islands later functioned as slave holding-centres and as provisions pick-up points for large slave carrying ships (slavers) en route to and from the Americas.

Spain "discovered", conquered and defended a large part of the New World from the 1490s. Although the Spanish were the first Europeans to arrive in the New World, they were the last to establish major slave run plantations in its colonies. Indigenous populations in the Americas were being decimated both by conquest and the many diseases brought over from Europe and Africa (including smallpox, measles, influenza, malaria and plague). Death rates were so high that (from around 1510) Spanish settlers began to import small numbers of Africans, licensed from Portuguese ships, to work as slaves, mainly in the gold and silver mines.

So, in the early 16th century, Spain and Portugal together controlled the bulk of Atlantic commerce. Spain had a foothold in the Caribbean, was expanding onto the American mainland; while Portugal was well established on the West coast of Africa.

Thus, Portugal was the first European nation to engage in the Atlantic slave trade. From the 1440s, they dominated both slave trading, as well as Atlantic trade for the next 150 years. Portuguese settlers started to colonise Brazil in the 1530s, beginning sugar production shortly after and were reaping huge profits by the end of the century, due to the shorter sailing times to and from Brazil and the African coast. Ships leaving Brazil could also reach Europe faster than they could from anywhere else in the Americas. So, Portugal's continuing involvement in African and New World commerce (sanctioned by a series of Papal Bulls between 1442 and 1456) centred both on sugar production and slave trading to Brazil, its East Atlantic possessions and to Spanish America. By 1600, roughly 200,000 Africans had been transported to the Americas¹.

From the mid 17th century, Portugal's monopoly over the slave trade was starting to come under mounting pressure, initially due to the fall of Timbuktu (a major source of slaves) to the Moroccan "Red Fez" in 1590 and later on from competing English and Dutch ships arriving on the Guinea coast. Portugal responded by gradually moving its West African slave trading bases south. Congo was "discovered" in 1482 and Angola colonised in 1591.

From the early 17th century, the Netherlands was emerging as a major threat to Portuguese and Spanish colonial and commercial dominance of the Atlantic. The Dutch West India Company was formed in 1621 for the purpose of securing its own supplies of sugar and tobacco by plundering Spanish ships and dislodging the Portuguese from Africa and Brazil. For a short period beginning in

1637, the Dutch captured and held a large part of Brazil, several forts on the West African coast including El-Mina with its large slave holding capacity, and in 1641 replaced the Portuguese at Luanda (Angola). Although the Dutch had the greater navy, Portugal regained control of Brazil and Luanda in the late 1640s.

The Growth of Atlantic Trade: 1650s-1880s

Meanwhile, Spanish colonial expansion was hampered to a large extent by legal restrictions back at home and weakened by Dutch incursions and disruptions to its trade routes. This allowed the English and French settlers to set up their own New World colonies, sugar production and trade networks. By the 1620s, English merchants had established tobacco colonies in the eastern Caribbean and Virginia, aided by a rising population at home, high numbers of English emigrants² and regular ships leaving English ports for the New World. While Spain was on the defensive, fending off the Dutch West India Company from its shores, England colonised Barbados in 1627 and began sugar production in the 1640s with the help of Dutch expertise and a combination of African slaves bought from Dutch slave traders, English and Irish indentured or convict labourers, and indigenous American "servants". From the 1650s onwards, English planters began employing a predominantly African slave labour force. The "Navigation Act" (1651) obliged English colonists to export their produce to England on English ships. Jamaica was taken from the Spanish, declared a colony of the Crown in 1655, and soon became the most profitable of all the English colonies. England's colonial ambitions in the Americas mutually depended on both the efforts of privateers as well as the colonising aims of the State. In other words, private financed commerce flourished under the protection of public military power, while the State gained increasingly from tariffs on colonial trade.

The Dutch continued to supply African slaves to English plantation owners until 1660 after which the "Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa", replaced by the "Royal African Company" in 1672, gained the sole right to supply slaves to all the English colonies. However, unable to effectively enforce its monopoly status, and under mounting pressure to meet the increasing labour demands from the Americas, England opened up the slave trade in the 1690s to private companies and entrepreneurs. By the 1720s, independent privateers were dominating the slave trade. The Royal African Company was eventually disbanded in 1750-52.

In the mid 17th century, France strengthened her marine and navy fleets, colonised the Caribbean islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Saint Dominique and began sugar production using African slaves supplied mostly by Dutch and English traders. By the end of the 17th century, and as planters became more wealthy, plantations increased in both size and scope, incorporating processing mills on their estates and often as many as 2-300 African slave labourers³. Manufacture as well as cultivation became increasingly common, especially in the French colonies.

By the 1720s, British and French planters and merchants were dominating Atlantic trade. However, during the 2nd half of the 18th century, until the Haitian Revolution of the 1790s, the French colonies were producing on average more, cheaper and higher grade sugar than the British colonies, which gave them greater overall control of European markets. While British planters enjoyed a monopoly (in the form of tariff protection) on sugar imported into Britain, the French colonies were larger, had better developed infrastructure (irrigation schemes, roads, canals, port facilities etc) and were typically more self-sufficient. Whereas French authorities permitted the refining of sugar on its colonies, British produced sugar was refined back in the metropolis. This allowed the French planters to benefit from the sale of sugar by-products (molasses) to North America. French planters were also more willing to re-invest their profits within the colonies, whereas a larger proportion of British planters became merchants and bankers who remitted their gains straight back to Britain. So, all in all, French run plantations soon became more profitable than British ones. By 1770, French produced sugar exceeded British output⁴. Saint Dominique became

the world's leading sugar producer and the most prosperous and productive of French possessions until its destruction during the Jacobite Revolution (1791-1804) and subsequent British and then French efforts to gain control of the former French colony. This effectively removed France as a leading beneficiary of New World trade.

Throughout the Americas, colonists of all nationalities came to rely less and less on indigenous and European labourers and increasingly on the more profitable use of African captives as their chief labour source. By the 17th century, 1,870,000 Africans had been shipped across the Atlantic⁵. The enslavement of Africans was justified in European minds by a racist ideology, supported by Christian theology, and legalised by European governments through a series of laws adopted and refined by their more or less autonomous colonial administrations. All this was encouraged by the demands of European consumers for slave produced commodities. Around 6 million Africans arrived in the Americas between 1700 and 1806⁶, the overwhelming majority delivered on British, French and Portuguese ships. This included around 30 per cent imported into Brazil, 23 per cent to the British Caribbean, 22 per cent to the French Caribbean, 9.6 per cent to Spanish America and the remaining 14 per cent to the Dutch and Danish Caribbean and to North America⁷.

Atlantic trade initially consisted of triangular trade routes with ships continuously circulating commodities from Europe to Africa, slaves from Africa to the Americas, and the fruits of slave labour from the Americas back to Europe again. Later on, Atlantic trade routes formed a much more complex web of usually bilateral routes stitched together by numerous European nations linking a great many ports in Europe to those on the African and American coasts. Large cargo ships would set sail from Europe to the Americas carrying European goods to the growing societies of the Americas and back again bringing sugar etc to Europe; while smaller, faster ships were specifically designed and constructed for transferring slaves and these would sail back and forth from Africa to the Americas. Shipping lanes linked the New World to its primary African labour source and Europe to its main source of raw materials. The triangular trade soon developed into a much more integrated network of inter-dependent traders, bankers, agriculturists, African slave labourers, and the military might of competing European governments; all this driven and paid for by increasing European consumer demand for the addictive stimulant and intoxicant commodities of sugar, coffee, tobacco and rum and the manufacturing demand for these and other raw or semi-processed materials (most importantly cotton). Privateers were encouraged by the profits available as suppliers and governments were attracted to support them in return for the revenue gained from taxation.

By 1770, European-controlled New World slave based colonies, or colonies with substantial African slave populations, were clustered around the Caribbean, the southern United States and Brazil. British "possessions" included its North American colonies of Maryland, Carolina and Georgia plus the Caribbean islands of Jamaica, Barbados, Granada and the Leeward Islands. France controlled Saint Dominique, Guadeloupe and Martinique. Spain held Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, Peru, and present day Argentina. The Portuguese were established in Brazil. The Virgin Islands were Danish and the Dutch held the north-eastern coastal areas of South America (Demorara and Surinam). While the Caribbean and Brazil concentrated mainly on sugar production, the vast British North American colonies specialised more on the production of cotton, tobacco, rice and other foodstuffs.

All this had a major and profound impact on the formation and growth of American society from the 16th century onwards. Islands and large mainland areas once lightly populated by indigenous peoples became European governed African re-settlement areas. High initial investment from the metropolis, population growth, technological and productivity improvements, increasing exports, as well as the enormous wealth that was generated from slavery and slave trading, all contributed to the growing autonomy of colonial economies. By the late 18th century, North America was already one of the richest countries in the world⁸.

Foreign trade played a major role in stimulating pre-revolution US economic growth. The export market in the north Americas was established by slave grown agricultural produce from the Caribbean and expanded by southern US cotton plantations. Paras: "Trade with the sugar islands, legal or otherwise, helped keep the wheels of American commerce turning and, in addition, made an original and independent contribution to the formation of American capital"⁹. Indeed, the sugar islands were almost entirely dependent on North American food supplies, building materials and livestock (cattle and horses) for cultivating the plantations. These mainland exports and other necessities were exchanged for sugar, rum, molasses and cash which helped fund US imports of British goods. North Americans also became important freighters of goods, and major ship builders for the British merchant fleet. For example, in the decade preceding the American Revolution (1775-83), British North America was building 40,000 tons of shipping per year¹⁰. By 1860, 4 million slaves were still working in the United States¹¹. Thus, the slave trade combined with the profits from Atlantic trade provided the capital and labour needed to build large-scale plantations, extract natural resources, build American cities, and develop the Americas.

Impact on Africa

When the Portuguese arrived on the West coast of Africa in the 1440s, most regions on the continent were settled with advanced self-sufficient civilisations. Agriculture, grazing, mining and industry were all well established. Sub-Saharan Africa had already built up trade links with Arab traders on the northern coast, Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East, India and the Pacific islands.

The Atlantic slave trade impacted negatively on Africa in a number of major ways. Firstly, Africa suffered a huge loss of able-bodied, mostly young male workers, who were forcibly removed from principally agricultural based societies. Second, although slavery existed in Africa (and in Europe) long before the Europeans arrived on the West coast of Africa, the Atlantic slave trade along with the East African and trans-Saharan slave trades stimulated and imbedded internal slavery into sub-Saharan economies. Third, while there is no doubt that Europeans did steal Africans from the coast themselves, the vast majority of Africans loaded onto ships were bartered or paid for with European (and Asian) commodities. The predominant view is that for the most part these goods were either socially destabilising or detrimental to local based industries. Walter Rodney: "A developing Africa went into slave trading and European commercial relations as into a gale force wind, which shipwrecked a few societies, set many others off course, and generally slowed down the rate of advance"¹².

While Europe built a powerful trade and industrial based empire assisted by African slave labour in the New World, Africa experienced only tortoise economic development, due in large part to the loss of a large proportion of its young and able-bodied (and intellectual) workforce. This was especially devastating for its labour-intensive agricultural economies. Lost to slavery also were the potential scientists and inventors who could have allowed Africa to join the Industrial Revolution on an equal footing with Europe.

Four hundred years of Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, and French enslavement and transportation of around 12 million Africans from West and Central Africa to the New World, known as the African Holocaust, is thus cited as one of the major reasons for Africa's underdevelopment today. Another ten million (mainly women) from East Africa were enslaved between 650-1900 AD by Arab traders and taken north into Spain and Portugal and East to India, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. According to Klein, in the 6 centuries before the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade between 3.5 and 10 million Africans were sent north to the Mediterranean countries and east into Arabia¹³.

Klein: "It cannot be denied that the transatlantic slave trade did have an impact, at the very least, in slowing African population growth considerably, if not bringing on an actual decline. Unquestionably the estimated 4.3 million slave and free persons of African descent who were

resident in America in the 1790s would have made a significant contribution to the growth of the African population had they remained in Africa¹⁴. According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in 1750, Africans numbered 106 million (13.4% of the world population), in 1950 Africans numbered 221 Million (8.8% of the world population)¹⁵. According to Walvin, around 12 million Africans were sold to European slave traders¹⁶. Agbodeka estimates 11 million Africans were lost during the transatlantic slave era and a further 9 million died during slave raids, the march to the coast, in colonial dungeons and the Middle Passage¹⁷. Walvin: "For around a millennium sub-Saharan Africa suffered a massive loss of population, generally the fittest and youngest, causing widespread and incalculable human and social as well as economic damage"¹⁸.

The slave wars also killed off many more African men, women and children and fuelled hostility between different communities causing ethnic fractionalisation and distorting the development of African societies. The regular and systematic practice of slave raiding and the seizing of defenceless Africans peasants by slave raiders resulted in fertile agricultural land being abandoned by farmers and caused and cost local societies to concentrate more of their resources on defence and militarisation.

The Atlantic slave trade boosted the existing but small domestic slave trade to such an extent that, in the end, the internal slave trade between African societies numerically rivalled and surpassed the trade on the coast. At the height of the Atlantic slave trade there were around the same number of slaves held in Africa, 3-5 million¹⁹, as there was in America; increasing to around 10 million in 1850²⁰. This caused massive social stratification within societies, and significantly altered relations between neighbouring African states.

African societies were also altered by the commodities from Europe, the Americas and Asia used to buy captives. The influx of cheap foreign merchandise undercut and crippled local production of the same agricultural and manufactured goods which in many cases established a long period of African dependency on European imports. For example, iron bars were brought to Africa from northern Europe and used as currency or smelted down by local blacksmiths to make tools, utensils, weapons and so on. This had a disastrous impact on the African mining industry, which could not compete with the cheaper imports from Europe. Similarly, cheaply produced cotton products from East India and later on from Manchester undercut and, in many cases, replaced African textile activities.

In exchange for slaves Africans were often given guns, gunpowder and cheap liquor (brandy and rum) among other things which served to debase societies and put a further stain on the economy. For example, when Europe was not at war, British arms manufacturers relied on their sales to those slave raiding African tribes who were selling captives to the Europeans on the coast. By the end of the 18th century, Britain was exporting almost a third of a million low grade guns to West Africa every year²¹. In 1788, one of the leading guns manufacturers in Birmingham stated: "According to the best calculation I have been able to make on the subject, the gun trade, in which I am considerably engaged, affords subsistence to between four and five thousand persons, who, in times of peace, are almost entirely supported by the African trade, a business so very different to any other, that their whole existence may be said to depend on it"²². Between 1796 and 1805, 44 percent of British arms exports went to West Africa²³.

Abolition and the End of Slavery: 1807-1888

Before the abolition of slavery, many African slaves commonly gained their freedom by escape or manumission (the buying of one's freedom with money or services). Slavery was finally ended in stages, first by the abolition of slave trading and afterwards by the prohibition on employers against using slaves as a labour force.

Two main reasons are given by historians as to why the British in particular ended (and forced other countries to end) their involvement in the Atlantic slave system: the first, on humanitarian

grounds, and second, because it was in Britain's economic interests to do so. While the first opinion is based on the well documented and influential rise of the Abolition Movement, the second opinion is based on economic data, political developments in North America, and a shift in British colonial focus from the West to East Indies.

During the 1750s, the Abolition Movement, formed by the Quakers in North America and Britain, began campaigning for the end of the slave trade. In 1787, a national campaign was launched in Britain by the Quakers, Methodists and other Protestant churches. William Wilberforce (1759-1833) was the leading politician arguing against the slave trade in parliament. Towards the end of the 18th century, the British public were largely in favour of abolition due in large part to the enormous amount of persuasive anti-slavery tracts put into circulation. Boycotts of imported slave produced goods from the Americas were organised. Mass petitions to the British Parliament resulted in the passing of new legislation that improved conditions on board the slave ships.

In 1807, the "Abolition of the Slave Trade Bill" (1807) prohibited slave trading on British territories. But it would be another 30 years until slaves working in British colonies would be freed. Meanwhile the Abolition Movement focused their attention on stopping other nations from participation. In 1814, 700 petitions signed by 1 million people called for universal abolition. Campaigns were also launched demanding full emancipation.

By the end of the 18th century, and after the loss of its North American colonies in 1783, Britain was turning its attention eastwards and to the cheap and plentiful land and labour available in India and its seemingly infinite new market place for British manufactures. The British sugar islands were declining in importance and soil exhaustion was hampering productivity in the British Caribbean. Plus, the colonial monopoly (higher prices) that the British sugar islands enjoyed with its British market along with fierce competition from the slave based economies of Brazil, Cuba and Britain's chief rival (France) were holding back British sugar trading into Europe. French sugar was significantly cheaper and dominating the European market due to better soil fertility and lower production costs. Before the Jacobite Revolution of the 1790s, the French colony of Saint Dominique alone was supplying over 40 percent of demand on the European mainland while Britain supplied over 35 percent²⁴. However, the French colonies in particular were dependent on slave labour supplied by British ships. Thus, the British abolition of the slave trade was seen (in France) as a direct attack on French commerce.

During the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15), British ships were barred from trading at European ports which impacted greatly on European demand for British sugar and caused further loss of parliamentary support for West Indian interests. In response to the drop in supplies of sugar into Europe and as a counter attack on British trade, Napoleon subsidised the large-scale production of beet sugar (as a sugar substitute) in France. After Napoleon was defeated in 1815, sugar beet declined sharply as supplies of cane sugar resumed.

By abolishing slavery in its colonies Britain recognised the immediate advantage this would give its rival European economies. Britain thus imposed a blanket ban on all Atlantic slave trading, enforced by its navy and, at the same time actively supported the abolitionist movements throughout Europe. The British navy were ordered to stop and search any vessels suspected to be carrying slaves on board. 150,000 Africans were freed from 1,600 ships between 1808 and 1888²⁵. Most of these were sent back to Africa. Meanwhile during the 1820s, a British naval blockade was set up off the African coast and various treaties signed with other European countries to permit stop and searches of any ship suspected of carrying slaves. In the 1840s, the British also signed treaties with African coastal governments which allowed them to land, search for and liberate any Africans being held on the mainland, ready for shipment.

So, while the Abolition Movement was certainly successful in swaying British public opinion against the slave trade, national interests and economic ambitions to gain a larger share of European markets were almost certainly more influential on British foreign policy. The British naval blockade on especially Spanish, French and Portuguese ships helped to level out colonial competition and

European sugar prices. It was this economic rather than moral motivation which is said to have been the driving force behind Britain's anti-slavery crusade against foreign slave trading.

In 1808, the United States prohibited slave trading. The U.S. abolition of slavery came nearly 60 years later amid the chaos and wreckage of the American Civil War (1861-65). Abraham Lincoln, whose northern Union army was being defeated by the Southern Confederates, proclaimed that any slave who ran away and joined his army would be freed. He also pledged to abolish slavery entirely if his army won the war. The Union army did win the war and slavery was outlawed in USA by an amendment of the constitution in 1865. Almost a sixth of the US population were freed from slavery.

In 1833, the British "Abolition of Slavery Bill" freed all slaves under the age of six years old and offered the rest a 6 year apprenticeship which meant working most of that time for free. £20 million (40 percent of the national budget²⁶) was set aside by parliament to compensate not the slaves but slave owners. After much outcry in Britain apprenticeship was scrapped early in 1835 and full emancipation in the British colonies was finally implemented in 1838. However, despite British and North American abolition in 1806 and 1807, a further 3 million Africans were transported and sold as slaves in the Americas during 19th century²⁷.

So, Britain abolished slave trading in 1807 and slavery in 1838. The U.S. ended slave trading in 1808 and slavery in 1865. France and Denmark abolished slavery in 1848, the Netherlands in 1863. Spain, under mounting pressure from British and U.S. governments passed their "Anti-Slave Trade Act" in 1866. The last slave ship landed in Cuba in 1867 bringing to an end more than 400 years of Atlantic slave trading. Spain abolished slavery 2 years later in 1886. Cuba ended slavery in 1884 following the "10 Years War" of independence (1868-78) with Spain. Brazil separated from Portugal in 1822 and under British pressure officially ended its slave trading in 1830. Unofficially Brazil carried on slave trading until the British invasion of its ports in 1850 after which the slave trade was deemed piracy and all slaves thereafter seized were shipped back to Africa. Brazil finally ended slavery in 1888.

Once slavery came to an end in the Americas, Africans abandoned the plantations and were replaced by free or indentured immigrant labourers brought to the Americas from Europe, India and China. However, for the vast majority of freed slaves, emancipation was followed by high rents and crippling debt. Share-cropping, tenant farming (where rent was paid with produce under the "crop-mortgage system") or poorly paid wage labour. Farmers, employed under the "crop mortgage system", were at the mercy of the weather, pests, soil condition as well as the ever fluctuating market price of their crop. Landowners kept a keen eye on both the market price and the size of the tenant's harvest and would raise the tenant's rent accordingly. Convict labour (which was disproportionately African-American) was used largely to improve infrastructure. Merchants acted both as grocers and bankers and sold provisions, clothes, tools, seed, usually on credit. This soon gave them almost total control of the farmer's harvest. Thus, many former slaves became slaves again, this time to debt. Reddie: "On many of the smaller islands, the planters owned so much land that Africans were forced to go back to their old masters and carry out the same work, in similar conditions as before"²⁸.

In the U.S., the Freedman's Bureau (1865-72) worked tirelessly to make possible a system of free and fair labour and property ownership for former slaves recognised and respected by employers, the general public and the courts. And yet, African Americans still feared barbaric reprisals from their old masters. Du Bois: "There was scarcely a white man in the South who did not honestly regard Emancipation as a crime and its practical nullification as a duty"²⁹. Colour prejudice, discrimination and economic inequality remained deeply embedded in the southern states.

In Africa, as the Atlantic slave trade was coming to an end, the European trade in (or extraction of) natural products gathered pace. The Berlin conference of 1884-85 (headed by Great Britain, France, Germany and Portugal) agreed to a political partitioning of Africa. The entire continent was divided up into fifty new geographical regions, each one claimed by one of a few of the most

powerful European nations at that time. During the entire colonial era up until around the middle of the 20th century, Europe (especially Britain and France) was producing saleable goods far in excess of what it needed; effectively using its labour and resources as well as the labour and resources of most of the rest of the world to push its economic growth forward at the expense of purposely stagnating or regressing the economic growth of its colonies. This stimulated and financed these countries' technological development, the building of machines and factories and further growth, while its capitalist system ruthlessly exploited its own peasantry as well as those in other countries.

2. Atlantic Slavery and British Capitalism

New World slavery formed the basis of Atlantic trade and development between the 15th and the 19th centuries. It united North and South America, Europe and Africa into a complex web of trade routes for the large-scale movement of men, women, children, goods and capital. Morgan: "The financial rewards accruing from such commerce appeared to be staggering"³⁰. Africans were bought and sold many times from their capture in the interior of Africa to their enslavement on the plantations of the Americas creating huge profits for slave trading companies. The commodities produced mostly for European consumption by slave labour, the imported products needed to sustain slave based societies, as well as the property, goods and services bought and paid for by slave trade profits all contributed significantly to the development of the British economy and colonial expansion. Blackburn: "Plantation-related demand and profits were large enough to have played an important role in the onset of industrial accumulation"³¹.

From as early as the 16th century, Spanish American slave-produced silver and gold was shipped to Spain, converted into bullion and used to pay for European imports which in turn boosted (among others) English manufacturing and trade. This also significantly increased the quantity of coins in circulation (the most reliable medium of exchange), stimulated European trade in general and played a major role in the shift away from subsistence towards market-aimed production. As a result, prices increased faster than the increases in wages, which increased rates of profit, stimulated the market sector and helped further the spread of capitalism throughout Europe³². Spanish bullion was also the "principle means" used to pay for Asian imports into Western Europe; around 19 tonnes were exported into Asia in the mid 17th century rising to 74 tonnes in the 1770s³³. This opened up new Eastern markets for European exports and in turn helped to pay for Asian imports which were re-exported into the rest of Europe, West Africa and the Americas. In a similar way, Brazilian gold, cotton, tobacco and coffee, English sugar and cotton, French sugar and so on provided these countries vital foreign exchange from the raw material imports refined, finished and re-exported to foreign markets.

Agriculture and the metal industries

Throughout the 18th century, British agriculture contributed most to national wealth accumulation until 1760³⁴. From 1770 until 1851, the share of national income produced by agriculture declined steadily from 45 to 20 percent³⁵. Nevertheless, agriculture still contributed hugely to the rise of wage labour, tenant farming and a more capitalist orientated economic structure which remained a vital part of the overall British economy thereafter, especially as productivity shot up during the Agricultural Revolution (between 1750 and 1825).

However, the growth of British agriculture was not wholly self-financing or independent of external investment or innovation. In fact, many New World planters and Atlantic merchants channelled their gains from slave trading and slave produced commodities into rural development and land ownership³⁶. The British government, enriched by colonial tax revenue, facilitated the speedier movement of domestic produce by improving infrastructure, thus linking farmers more

closely both to urban centres and international markets. Plus, the revolutionary shift from wooden to metal agricultural implements was made possible by the growing metal industries.

During the 18th century Industrial Revolution period, the metal and metal using industries (in particular iron) quickly developed into one of the strongest sectors. The metal industries (concentrated in the Midlands) benefitted hugely and developed rapidly through their involvement with slavery and slave trading. Ironmongery was in high demand by slave traders for trading purposes on the African coast (iron bars were commonly used to buy captives); chains and padlocks, branding irons, iron collars, handcuffs, torture devices etc were needed to restrain and punish captives after purchase; anchors, chains, heavy naval guns, nails, bolts etc were needed to build ships; and agricultural tools, casks bound in iron etc were exported to the colonies. Inikori: "It was estimated in the late eighteenth century that about 150,000 people were directly or indirectly dependent on the export trade in hardwares, largely in nails"³⁷.

Shipping and ship building

Overseas trade with Africa and the slave colonies along with slave trading provided a massive boost to the British shipping (service sector) and ship building (manufacturing) industries.

Around 3 million slaves were carried on British ships to the Americas during the 18th century³⁸. From 1701-1807, 11,000 ships originating from England carried 3.3 million captives from Africa to various parts of the Americas, including Spanish America and the French Caribbean islands³⁹. For the entire British slave trading period, Inikori puts the figure at 4.2 million⁴⁰. The percentage of shipping engaged in foreign trade with the Americas and West Africa increased from 28.6 percent in 1663 to 57.1 percent in 1836 while ships trading with Europe and the Mediterranean declined from 65 percent in 1663 to 21.5 percent in 1836, a "significant" part of which carried re-exported sugar, tobacco, rice and coffee etc from the Americas⁴¹. Britain's Atlantic trade thrived during the 17th and 18th centuries. Morgan: "Mercantilism, far from being a yoke that Britain needed to discard, provided a successful means of running a grand marine empire: shipping and trade, supported by naval strength, progressed over the long term despite temporary setbacks in times of commercial depression or war"⁴².

As the slave trade gathered pace so did development of the major British slave port cities of Liverpool, Bristol, London and Glasgow. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the British authorities, enriched by colonial and merchant tribute (customs duties on produce, wharf tariffs on ships) invested heavily in its merchant marine, military, harbours, docks and canals.

Slavery and Atlantic trade with the Americas and Africa also provided a massive boost to the British economy by providing jobs and wages for merchants, shipbuilders, sailors, dock workers etc, and all those employed in the inter-related industries from lumber jacks, carpenters, painters, ironmongers, rope and sail makers, and so on. In 1771, half of Liverpool's 6,000 sailors were engaged in the slave trade⁴³. In fact, most of Liverpool in 1774 was involved to some degree, either directly or indirectly with the slave trade⁴⁴. In 1810, there were around 280,000 workers employed in the shipping industry and engaged in foreign trade earning wages of around £15 million per year⁴⁵.

Whereas Liverpool gained more directly from the trading in African slaves, Bristol gained from the manufacture of goods produced by slavery. Williams: "Without the West Indian trade Bristol would be a fishing port"⁴⁶. James Baille, a pro-slavery politician in 1830, declared: "Bristol owes all her prosperity, nay her existence to her commerce with the West Indies"⁴⁷.

Thus, all those British ports most directly involved with the slave trade all experienced major development as docks, quaysides, warehouses and port facilities were all expanded. Related industries sprang up and ship building increased with the growing need for specialist vessels for carrying captives to the Americas, larger cargo ships for moving slave produced commodities back to Europe and warships for defending the colonies.

Manufacturing

Britain began to dominate Atlantic trade and slave trading towards the end of the 17th century. However, at the time, the bulk of Britain's exports were still being shipped to Europe in the form of woollen textiles (unfinished, un-dyed broadcloth) and towards the end of the 17th century more finished, lighter cloths (linens, silks and cottons) suited to the warmer climes of southern Europe. Wool was also being traded for European and Indian linen which was then manufactured in British factories for re-export to Africa and the Caribbean islands. Although northern Europe and the northern United States remained the principle export markets for British woollen products, they were, despite the tropical weather, heavily promoted by merchants and soon became highly fashionable and sought after on the African coast and throughout the sugar islands, especially Jamaica. In 1772, almost 3 per cent of British woollen exports went to the Caribbean and 4 per cent (lighter woollens) to Africa⁴⁸.

Grain was emerging as an important export as was wheat, fish, lead, tin, iron and coal. Meanwhile, imports were being increasingly sourced from the Americas including sugar, tobacco and rice. From the end of the 17th century, there was a major shift in British foreign trade away from Europe and towards the Americas. Morgan: "The intricate connections between consumer demand and British exports, aided by population growth in the Americas and income from the slave-sugar nexus, helped to boost and vary manufactured exports at a time when transatlantic markets were capturing an increasing portion of British overseas trade"⁴⁹. British merchants and shippers were dominating the Atlantic commodity and slave trades. British planters, with the help of Dutch expertise, were producing a steady supply of agricultural produce to manufacturers in Britain. By 1750, there were 555,000 Africans working for the British Empire in the New World⁵⁰.

Capital formation and accumulation in Britain supplied a crucial part of the working capital and credit demanded by young or expanding urban industries. British manufacturing in the 18th and early 19th centuries was much less able to self-finance its own development than the agricultural sector. The British slave system in the Americas helped transform and nourish new modes of production, created new trends in consumption back at home, provided an abundance of raw material imports and produced new foreign markets for these as exports.

Crucially, Atlantic slavery provided Britain with highly lucrative new markets for its commodity exports. Blaut argues that the demand for imports into the colonies was the driving force of the European Industrial Revolution⁵¹. Inikori: "Between 1699 and 1806, the growth of British overseas exports of manufactures was virtually dependent on Western Africa and the Americas"⁵². A wide range of British manufactures (Cotton, linen and woollen goods, hats, guns, gun powder, iron and lead bars, copper kettles, earthen and glassware, beads, ornaments, paper, alcohol, tobacco, household utensils and so on) were bought by slave trading companies and bartered on the African coast for African captives. Britain also supplied the growing New World colonies with manufactures, foodstuffs, equipment, coal, etc. By the end of the 18th century, British exports to the Americas alone amounted to two thirds of the total⁵³. Williams: "By 1750 there was hardly a trading or manufacturing town in England which was not in some way connected with the triangular or direct colonial trade"⁵⁴.

The production of export and re-export goods and the profits gained on them provided employment for British workers. Foreign trade was creating jobs outside of agriculture just as Britain's town and city populations were increasing rapidly. For example, in the 18th century, between 40 and 50 per cent of the non-agricultural labour force was engaged in producing goods for export, jobs that were otherwise non-existent in an economy that was steadily commercialising its agricultural production⁵⁵. The industrial workforce grew from 18.5 percent in 1688 to nearly half of the total workforce in 1847⁵⁶. It was estimated that every Englishman in the West Indies created employment for 5 seamen and many more manufacturers and tradesmen⁵⁷.

By the end of the 18th century, Britain took over from India as the world's leading textile producer. These industries played a crucial role in the early development of Britain's Industrial Revolution, transforming Lancashire into "the first modern industrial society in the world"⁵⁸ and employing three quarters of all industrial workers by 1840, half of which were in the cotton industry⁵⁹. According to Chapman, at the end of the 18th century, cotton was Britain's most important export⁶⁰ and by the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1815), the income generated by cotton goods alone represented 40 per cent of the total income received from exports⁶¹. According to Inikori, the cotton industry was the leading industry of the Industrial Revolution.

Manchester was at the centre of British cotton manufacturing and, as European merchants flooded into the city, soon established itself as an international emporium for cotton goods and became known as "tailor to the world's population".

The cotton industry was wholly dependent on the Atlantic slave trade and the slave run plantations of the New World. For example, the Industrial growth of Manchester depended foremost on the growth of Liverpool, its outlet to the sea and link to global markets. Liverpool's early growth and development as a major world trading port, which was funded almost entirely by or for its slave trading activities, thus paved the way for Manchester's elevation to import/export capital of Britain.

Manchester's cotton industry was almost entirely reliant on the supply of raw cotton it imported from the New World (slave operated) plantations of the Caribbean and later on from the American mainland along with other finishing materials such as gums, indigo and other dyestuffs. In 1780, West Indian cotton amounted to two-thirds of the total⁶². Cotton production began and expanded rapidly on slave operated plantations in the southern United States from the 1790s. By 1800, these plantations alone were supplying a third of all British cotton imports⁶³ and three quarters in the 1820s⁶⁴. Between 1779 and 1834, raw material cotton, which was imported mostly from the southern United States through Liverpool by ship-owning merchants or commission agents acting on behalf of the planter or exporter, rose from 30 to 300 million lbs⁶⁵. From 1815 until 1840, raw cotton imports grew four and a half times⁶⁶. In percentage terms raw cotton imports from the Americas (and also from Africa) between 1784 and 1856 amounted to between 85 and 98 percent of total raw cotton imports⁶⁷.

British manufactured cotton goods were increasingly sought after by slave traders to buy captives in Africa and exported to the rapidly increasing foreign markets in the Americas. In the first three quarters of the 18th century, "most" overseas demand came from Africa and New World colonies⁶⁸. In the mid 18th century, half of these goods were shipped to the American colonies and one third to Africa⁶⁹. In 1788, Manchester's exports to Africa alone (in the form of "Guinea cloth") provided employment for 180,000 men, women and children⁷⁰. Inikori: "The Americas and Western Africa together absorbed between 57 and 94 percent of total British cotton exports in the eighteenth century"⁷¹ and "remained the largest overseas markets for British cotton cloths up to the early 1850s"⁷².

So, the British cotton industry was central to the Industrial Revolution and played a major role in supporting the Atlantic slave system; and in return British manufacturers, as well as the Treasury, received huge overseas demand and revenue from Africa and the Americas. As overseas demand for British cotton goods increased, mechanical power and specialised machines were introduced and made possible the industrial development from a domestic workshop system to factory production, where the processes of manufacture became more and more concentrated underneath one roof leading to increased production. As foreign demand increased, the cotton industry also boosted the growth of the shipping industry, ports as well as domestic trade and transportation networks. The Liverpool-to-Manchester railway line was opened in 1830. It also contributed to the growth of the chemical, engineering and building industries. Iron and coal mines increased output to satisfy mill owners and so on.

Sugar, "the favoured child of capitalism", originated from the South Pacific (possibly Polynesia) and from there spread to India, Persia, the Arab world, along the Mediterranean, into

Europe and then across to the Americas. Sugar consumption was introduced into Europe by the spread of Islam and Arab expansion from the 7th and 8th centuries. From the 12th-16th centuries, growing quantities of sugar were being imported from North Africa, Spain and the Mediterranean into Britain for sale to wealthy buyers as a luxury item, used as a spice condiment, medicine, sweetener or preservative. Sugar was said to sooth the stomach, clean the blood, and clear the chest, throat and lungs. It was also used as one of the ingredients in remedies for the Black Death. Perishable foodstuffs (such as dairy products) were coated with sugar powder to preserve them. Syrups, sweetened with sugar, were used to preserve fruit, jam, and marmalade. From the 17th century onwards, as ever greater quantities began arriving in Europe from the slave-worked plantations of the Caribbean and Brazil; sugar became much more plentiful, affordable and featured more and more in the British diet. Urbanisation was accelerating. Work schedules increased with the spread of the factory system. Sugar became one of the first foods of the industrial work break and helped to make up the calorie gap for the majority of working people. Tea, coffee and drinking chocolate were the main vehicles which brought sugar into the country. By the end of the Atlantic slave era, sugar and sugary goods had been transformed from a rarity and a luxury to a necessity. It was seen as an essential part of the British working class diet and a necessity in almost every home. It was initially added to coffee, tea and drinking chocolate but soon used as a supplement to porridge and bread and a vital ingredient in custard, creams, pies and tarts, pastries, desserts (puddings), baked sweet dishes, biscuits, cakes, buns, chocolate and confectionary.

The addictive coffee, tea and drinking chocolate sweetened with sugar along with the tobacco and rum products of New World slave plantations all played an important role in stimulating the consumption of non-necessities among the new working class labourers of urban Britain. As the use of sugar in particular was soon adopted to create a multitude of new sweetened commodities, a large and ever growing portion of the population were drawn further into supporting new monetary relations and capitalist modes of consumption, the growth of new manufactures while re-circulating an ever larger share of their wage back into the economy and all the while adding to the perceived need to gain paid employment. Slave produced stimulants (coffee and drinking chocolate), drugs (tobacco and rum) and sweeteners (sugar) of the New World provided comfort and solace for the emerging working class employed as wage-labourers in the "veiled slavery" of British mines and factories.

Sugar cultivation and processing in the New World from the 16th century involved one of the earliest examples and pioneers of British industrial methods of production. These rapidly growing new "agro-industries" (a combination of fields and factories necessarily brought together, each as an essential and inter-dependent element in the production process) were established in the colonies rather than the metropolis for two main reasons. First, sugar cane thrives in a tropical climate and second, the cane juice had to be extracted and semi-processed as quickly as possible (on site), otherwise the quality of the cane juice would quickly deteriorate. Further, successful sugar plantations require fertile or fertilised, well-watered soil and reliable sea breezes. For these reasons sugar was deemed the most profitable crop suited for cultivation and processing in the New World.

Sugar cultivation involved clearing, turning and irrigating the ground, planting the sugar in long trenches, weeding the fields and on maturity (between 14-18 months) cutting the cane. The harvest period lasted between 6-9 weeks⁷³, while subsidiary crops were planted and timed to keep the slave labour force busy for much of the rest of the year. The cane was then cut and rushed to the mill for the extraction of its juice before it dried out or deteriorated. Mills were sometimes wind or water powered, ox-driven or sometimes slave driven. The tops of the cane were cut off and used as animal feed, mill waste was used as fuel to heat the furnaces. The mill itself would usually operate 16-18 hours a day, 3 weeks a month and 7-8 months a year⁷⁴. In some cases mills would run 24 hours a day for 5 months of the year⁷⁵. Typically, the cane was crushed and ground in between large rollers and an extra press used to extract the remaining juice. The cane juice was then boiled and any impurities skimmed in a succession of copper vats. The boiled juice would then be poured into clay

moulds for cooling (crystallisation). The semi-refined, crude, brown "sugar loaf" was then packed into hogshead barrels and dispatched to the next ship where it would be taken to Europe for further refining and distribution.

Final sugar refining was banned in the British colonies and heavy duties imposed on finished sugar from outside or elsewhere in the empire. This gave British planters a monopoly and control over the supply and price paid by British consumers. Thus, sugar became more expensive in Britain than elsewhere in Europe where supplies from Portuguese and French colonies remained cheaper and more plentiful. As sugar output from the Americas increased rapidly, so did the growth of the new sugar refining industry in Britain (concentrated in London, Bristol and Glasgow) and its subsidiary trades. There were already 120 sugar refineries in England in the mid 18th century⁷⁶. These and tobacco manufacturers in and around the slave trading ports led the way in their use of industrial methods of production. Distilleries were set up to utilise the supply of molasses (a useful by-product of sugar used in the distillation process of rum). Rum was distilled and distributed widely throughout the domestic market and to slave traders as one of the main products bartered for captives. Meanwhile, the sugar islands were at the forefront of the Atlantic commerce throughout the slave era, played a large part in the world economy, and provided numerous British cities with a steady, reliable source of capital accumulation. In the 1740s, sugar was the most valuable commodity being traded in the world⁷⁷.

Capital accumulation

Britain built up a vast amount of wealth (capital accumulation) during and as a direct result of Atlantic slavery and the slave trade. At the end of the 18th century, Britain's income from its West Indian colonies amounted to four times what it received from the rest of the world⁷⁸.

Because a large number of British planters were absent, and because plantation expenses were largely funded by secondary crops and by-products, "the lion's share" of primary (sugar) profits was remitted back to the metropolis and thus available for expenses and investment in Britain's domestic economy. According to Blackburn: "In 1770, this represented between 21 and 55 percent of "gross fixed capital formation"⁷⁹. The vast profits gained by slave labour thus allowed many plantation owners and their families to return to England, build, maintain and lavishly furnish huge estates and spend out of their fortunes on British goods and services.

Similarly, the wealth accumulated by British merchants by trading in slaves or slave produced commodities flowed back into the British economy in a myriad of different ways. In the 1760s, the vast majority of merchants in Britain traded either directly or indirectly with the Caribbean colonies⁸⁰. Foreign commerce also provided British merchants with the international expertise to set up their own industrial activities well placed to take advantage of foreign markets or lend out their capital accumulated overseas for other merchants' endeavours.

Government military expenditure, the expenses of war and colonial protection were offset by import duties, tax rises, and the revenue generated by new colonial acquisitions and markets. European wars also supported the weapons industry, shipbuilding etc. For example, although Britain lost America's War of Independence (1783), it did defeat the French, Spanish and Dutch and gained among others, the lucrative Caribbean islands of Jamaica, Trinidad, Tobago and St. Lucia. In 1798, the annual income from British Caribbean plantations was estimated to be around £4 million, with all other foreign income sources amounting to £1 million⁸¹. Increasing imports provided the government with additional tax receipts. At the end of the 18th century, central government tax income from custom duties amounted to roughly one third of the total⁸². A positive balance of payments, despite related State expenditure on colonial protection and wars with rival European powers, was crucial to an expanding British economy.

Planters and merchants invariably relied on credit from banks and independent investors to capitalise their business ventures. The slave trade and plantation economies of the 17th and 18th

centuries relied on the availability of land, labour and capital investment. Investment was needed to start or expand businesses for example plantation farms and/or sugar mills, shipping companies and so on. This was achieved by borrowing short-to-medium term credit from investors, merchants, syndicates of merchants or sometimes the same merchants who marketed the planter's produce. Even after the land was improved and plantations well established, credit (which was also offered by slave traders) was often used to increase the slave labour force and to buy replacement slaves. Credit, in the form of merchandise advances, was also made available (albeit to a much lesser extent) to slave traders on the African coast on condition that an agreed number of slaves would be ready and available at a specified date for immediate transfer onto the arriving ships. These contracts increased shipping efficiency by shortening the length of time (the coasting period) merchants had to spend accumulating slaves at African ports.

Purchases within the Americas were usually paid for with commodities or bills of exchange. A bill of exchange could be an addition to the credit balance a planter has built up with his lender or a claim against the expected price the debtor's produce will fetch after being shipped to market. By the end of the 17th century, creditors were offering loans to planters through a system of bonds or equivalent securities. This system became popular after the British Colonial Debts Act (1732 abrogated in 1797) declared that lands, houses, chattels and the slaves of debtors could be seized and sold to satisfy payment defaults. Popular from the 1750s, the "immediate remittance system" allowed credit payment for slaves in the form of long maturity bills (up to 3 years) guaranteed by merchants in England.

Credit terms for the purchase of slaves varied according to the supply and demand conditions of the slave trade itself or trading conditions of whichever commodity was being produced by the planter. Whereas the Latin legal system protected the interests of the planters over lenders, British laws favoured the creditor. In practise, this usually meant that lenders to Brazilian defaulters could seize only crops, whereas under British Law capital goods and/or land and property (including slaves) could be seized. French law followed closer to the Latin model.

The profits earned on credit interest and returns on investment provided banks with an additional source of income. Planter and merchant profits held in British banks would have been channelled as loans with interest into national and regional development projects as well as funding further foreign endeavours creating further capitalisation of banks.

So, Atlantic slavery provided vital stimulus to the early evolution of banking houses, the stock exchange, as well as insurance houses; which in turn helped to build up capital accumulation and an economy based on credit throughout and after the Industrial Revolution. Crucially, institutions such as these provided the circulating capital and credit to keep the economy moving forward. Banks also bought plantations in the New World and invested in slave trading ventures. For example, the Barclay brothers, David and Alexander, opened sugar plantations, married into banking families and established Barclays Bank, one of the leading financial institutions in the world today. Francis Baring used his profits gained from slavery to set up his own Barings Bank. The Liverpool slave trader Thomas Leyland became a partner in one of the city's oldest banks (Leyland Bank) which, after a series of takeovers, became Midland Bank which is now HSBC.

Conclusion

The Atlantic economy and early capitalism were given an all important lease of life by one of the most savage and immoral regimes the world has ever known. No doubt the entire Atlantic economy and trade between Britain and the Americas, until the middle of the 19th century, would have been inconceivable without slave labour and the slave trading that made this possible. At the heart of the Atlantic slave system, private (State backed) planters were able to extract huge gains from their coerced, low maintenance African slave labour force.

While slavery and the slave trade played only a limited role in the industrialisation of Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and France, superior naval power allowed Britain to take centre stage and profit hugely from its involvement in the slave trading and from the proceeds it gained from slave labour in its colonies. These profits provided a major boost to the British economy in the 18th century and made a significant contribution to the early growth of British capitalism and industrialisation. Morgan: "Economic historians are universally agreed that the expansion of trade and colonisation was integral to British economic development in the eighteenth century"⁸³. In fact, the gains made from slavery helped propel British agrarian capitalism to the new heights of industrialism and soon after to global dominance. As capitalism advanced and industrial production expanded, along with consumption, the dependency of the British economy on African slaves increased.

Agriculture was significantly boosted and altered by the growing metal industries, improvements in domestic and coastal infrastructure and benefitted from some direct investment from the profiteers of slavery. Manufacturing received a massive boost from the steady supply of cheap raw material imports and the opening up of new Atlantic export markets. Most notable among these were the metals, shipbuilding, cotton and sugar industries while improvements to Britain's infrastructure again made possible and facilitated the speedier movement of goods around the country and to the ports for export. All this created employment opportunities for millions of British workers.

Increasing foreign demand for British exports caused a labour shift in emphasis from rural agriculture to urban industry. The growth of industry supported the expansion of agriculture; the expansion of agriculture diminished the need to import food for a rapidly increasing population which in turn helped the national balance of payments. All through the 18th century, British imports and exports were increasingly going to and coming from the Americas. Around 40 per cent of industrial output during the 18th century was destined for export⁸⁴, much of this in the form of re-exported colonial produce and raw materials from the Americas.

All those manufacturers involved with the Atlantic economy struggled to keep their supply of goods in pace with increasing foreign demand. As overseas demand continually surpassed the limits of productivity, new technological advancements and new modes of production were sought-after and introduced to increase output. These innovations among others were crucial to Britain's Industrial Revolution. New modes of production were tried, tested and steadily improved upon in the colonies, as well as by those manufacturers in and around the slave ports of Britain, paving the way and providing an early example for other related and non-related industries during the later part of the Industrial Revolution period.

Capital accumulation in Britain dwarfed that of competing European nations with important contributions coming from: slave trading companies, merchants and their financial backers; remittances from plantation owners and their British hired staff (overseers, accountants etc); manufacturers involved in a) exporting British made goods to Africa and the New World colonies; and b) refining slave produced commodities and selling these at home and abroad; central government tariffs on trade.

It is thus clear enough that a major, if not decisive, contribution to British capitalism and industrial development can be sourced to the profits earned overseas on commodities produced by African slave labour along with the goods produced by British workers used to buy slaves in Africa and needed to support and develop the growing slave colonies. Walvin: "Slavery was the means by which the West emerged to a position of unrivalled economic and political dominance. Stated simply, African slave labour, transplanted into the Americas, was critical to the creation of Western wealth and the consequent relegation of other regions and peoples to the overarching power of the West"⁸⁵.

This is yet another clear and irrefutable example of the exploitative and unscrupulous character of the capitalist system, geared as it always is by its nature to extract maximum labour with minimum recompense for its labourers in order to achieve the greatest possible profits.

Whenever increasing profits is the principle aim of an economic system, as is innately true of capitalism, then those who have nothing but their labour to offer are almost entirely at the mercy of their employers. History shows that capitalist employers, when they can get away with it, are normally prone to have the least possible regard for their workforce. During the 400 years of African enslavement, slave owners could and regularly did escape accountability for even the pre-meditated murder of their workers. The fact that living conditions were so poor in the colonial dungeons on the African coast, on the plantations in the Americas and especially on board the slavers during the Middle Passage - and because death rates were so high from captivity to enslavement - is ample proof of the extremely low value capitalist slave owners gave their possessions.

The low value accorded to African slaves demonstrates the ease in which dead workers in the New World could be replaced. When a labour supply is plentiful, then capitalist employers can, and do, drive down the cost (wages, working conditions etc) of their workers. Death rates confirm that in many cases the cost of African slave labour in the form of basic food and shelter was driven down lower than that required for human survival. Any suggestion that Atlantic slavery hindered capitalism because slaves are supposedly less productive than free, wage-labourers does not take account of the historical fact that any monetary disincentive slave labourers might have had to work hard was brutally offset by the whip. African slaves did work hard in the Americas. Millions were literally worked to death. Indeed, if it were not for slavery, the entire Americas along with Europe would not be where it is today.

Capitalism then has its roots soaked in the blood of millions of African men, women and children. Capitalism taken to its logical conclusion, as was practiced in the New World, required that millions more unwilling workers had to be brutally coerced into accepting the slave labour system. Africans were tortured, maimed, as well as physically, sexually and psychologically abused. Child labour was widespread. Human rights were ignored. To replenish an ever depleting workforce, human trafficking was practiced on a scale never before or since witnessed. All this was sanctioned by the State and encouraged by the new capitalist ideology. The main culprits were Britain, France, Spain and Portugal. The long suffering victim was and still is Africa. One of the tragic legacies is that these and other European nations got away with it and are still enjoying the economic benefits of their ill-gotten gains over a century after the practice came to an end, while Africa and Africans world-wide still bear the economic and psychological scars. Africa too is where it is today in large part because of slavery.

The so-called "miraculous rise of Europe"⁸⁶ over and above other continents, which is mistakenly said to have stemmed from an innate ethnocentric racial superiority, was not in fact autonomous after all but therefore made possible in large part because of the enslavement, colonisation and coerced labour of others.

The horrors of the entire slavery period marks one of the darkest periods of human history. It was also a period where a fledgling capitalism flourished unhindered by regulation and capitalists openly demonstrated the true character of their ideology. Capitalists loathe and try to evade regulation. Regulations lower profits. Thus, it can be rightly argued that legal and large-scale slavery represents the epitome of capitalism.

Notes

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3. Ibid p. 333.
4. Ibid p. 432.
5. Ibid p. 377.
6. Klein, Herbert, *THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE* p. 45.
7. Blackburn, Robin, *THE MAKING OF NEW WORLD SLAVERY FORM THE BOROQUE TO THE MODERN, 1492-1800* p. 384.
8. Ibid p. 477.
9. Solow, Barbara (ed.), *SLAVERY AND THE RISE OF THE ATLANTIC SYSTEM* pp. 261-2.
10. Blackburn, Robin, *THE MAKING OF NEW WORLD SLAVERY FORM THE BOROQUE TO THE MODERN, 1492-1800* p. 480.
11. Walvin, James, *THE SLAVE TRADE* p. 77.
12. Rodney, Walter, *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* p. 135.
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14. Ibid p. 127.
15. United Nations Environment Programme:
http://maps.grida.no/go/graphic/population_and_development_in_africa
16. Walvin, James, *THE SLAVE TRADE* p. 7.
17. Agbodeka. An economic history of Ghana p. 28.
18. Walvin, James, *THE SLAVE TRADE* pp. 12-13.
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21. Blackburn, Robin. *THE MAKING OF NEW WORLD SLAVERY FORM THE BOROQUE TO THE MODERN, 1492-1800* p. 385.
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23. Ibid p. 460.
24. Abbott, Elizabeth, *SUGAR. A BITTERSWEET HISTORY* p. 174.
25. Klein, Herbert, *THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE* p. 41.
26. Reddie, Richard., S, *ABOLITION. THE STRUGGLE TO ABOLISH SLAVERY IN THE BRITISH COLONIES* p. 224.
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28. Reddie, Richard., S, *ABOLITION. THE STRUGGLE TO ABOLISH SLAVERY IN THE BRITISH COLONIES* p. 227.
29. Du Bois, W.E.B.. *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK* p. 23.
30. Morgan, Kenneth, *SLAVERY, ATLANTIC TRADE AND THE BRITISH ECONOMY, 1660-1800* p. 37.
31. Blackburn, Robin, *THE MAKING OF NEW WORLD SLAVERY FORM THE BOROQUE TO THE MODERN, 1492-1800* p. 554.
32. Inikori, Joseph. E., *AFRICANS AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN ENGLAND* p. 204.
33. Ibid p. 206.
34. Blackburn, Robin, *THE MAKING OF NEW WORLD SLAVERY FORM THE BOROQUE TO THE MODERN, 1492-1800* p. 545.
35. Ibid p. 518.
36. Ibid pp. 545-6.
37. Inikori, Joseph. E., *AFRICANS AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN ENGLAND* p. 68.
38. Morgan, Kenneth, *SLAVERY, ATLANTIC TRADE AND THE BRITISH ECONOMY, 1660-1800* p. 10.
39. Inikori, Joseph. E., *AFRICANS AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN ENGLAND* p. 237.
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41. Inikori, Joseph. E., *AFRICANS AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN ENGLAND* pp. 280-81.
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86. The "miraculous rise theory", supported by a Eurocentric coloniser's model of world history maintains that innovation and progress has been identified first in the Near East and later, through Greece and Rome to Western Europe and from there diffused to the periphery and the rest of the world.

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